

Accreditation of Prior Learning



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This guide has been produced by Escalate at the University of Bradford. It aims to support all students with an application to accredit their previous learning and experience. It is recommended that you discuss the process of APL for your course/programme with your course team, who will be able to advise you of the timescale for your application and the format it should take.

What is Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)?

The University of Bradford recognises that everyone has knowledge and skills gained through previous learning and experiences. APL allows you to demonstrate the learning you have gained from these previous activities: you may be able to claim academic credit for these if they meet the learning outcomes of modules in your higher education programme of study. This could benefit you by removing the requirement to study (and be assessed in) an area you are already competent in, and reducing the overall time and cost of your programme.

Definitions and Terminology

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)	The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement. This may either be certificated learning (APCL) or prior experiential learning (APEL), where learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and recognised for academic purposes. APL is also sometimes referred to as Accreditation of Prior Learning Achieved (APLA).
Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)	A process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.
Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)	A process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes
Accreditation of concurrent learning (ACL)	A process that acknowledges the learning that takes place alongside a formal programme of study, e.g. learning from experiences at work, volunteering or in the community, that can be assessed, and as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.
Admission with Credit	Commencing a programme of study having successfully entered an APL claim resulting in the award of credit toward a named award but less than a full academic year of credit, e.g. less than 120 credits.
Advanced Standing	Similar to “admission with credit” but where an APL claim is made successfully and for a substantial volume of credit allowing the learner to enter a named award at a higher level, e.g. entering UG programmes at level 5 or level 6 instead of level 4.
Assessment regulations	The rules governing assessment of a programme of study including marking scheme, pass mark, requirements for progression to subsequent levels or stages of a programme and award and classification requirements (for instance in terms of credits to be achieved and specific marks to be attained).
Credit	Credit is awarded to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level. It is normally grouped into modules of, e.g. 10 or 20 credits.
Credit level	An indicator of the relative complexity, demand and/or depth of learning and of learner autonomy.
Credit level descriptors	The generic characteristics of learning at a specific level, used as reference points.

Credit value	The number of credits, at a particular level, assigned to a body of learning. The number of credits is based on the estimated notional learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).	
Credit accumulation	A process of achieving credits over time in relation to a planned programme of study.	Each HE awarding body determines what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer in relation to its individual programmes.
Credit transfer	A mechanism which allows credit awarded by a higher education (HE) awarding body to be recognised, quantified and included towards the credit requirements for a programme delivered by another HE provider and/or between programmes offered by an HE provider.	
Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	A system which enables learners to accumulate credit, and which facilitates the transfer of that credit within and between education providers.	
General Credit	Credit for prior learning which only achieves currency when applied to a particular programme of study.	
Learning outcomes	Statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning relating to defined modules or units of learning.	
Level outcomes	Statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning at a defined academic level.	
Module/unit	A self-contained, formally structured, learning experience with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.	
Notional hours of learning	The number of hours which it is expected that a learner (at a particular level) will spend, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level.	
Qualification descriptors	Generic statements of the outcomes of study for the main qualification at each level which exemplify the nature and characteristics of that qualification.	
Specific Credit	Credit for prior learning that can be accredited against a specific module(s) and/or programme leading to an award. The amount of credit that can be imported / transferred will be dependent on the appropriateness of those credits to the award sought.	

Source: Higher Education Credit Framework for England, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, August 2008

How much credit can I claim?

The University Regulations allow you to claim up to 50% of the balance of the named award for which you enrol. This means that you can claim 50% of the remaining credits after any application for Advanced Standing or Admission with Credit. Advanced standing is where you have enough prior learning and experience to gain credit for a whole level of the course. For example if you have prior learning or experience equivalent to Year 1 of a degree you may be able to enter at Year 2. If you think you are eligible for Advanced Standing you should contact your course team to discuss making an application. If you are approved for Advanced Standing you could enter the course at the start of Year 2 or even Year 3. You could then apply for up to 60 credits but would have to study a minimum of 60 credits in your final year to gain an honours degree.

Example Scenarios

John has enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Leadership and Management. He has 10 years experience as a Manager and has done some training courses through work and his volunteer work with the local Scouting Association. The full Foundation Degree is 240 credits.

*John may be able to claim **Advanced Standing** of 120 credits at Stage 1 (Level 4) by demonstrating he can meet the Stage 1 outcomes with his experience and training. He can then apply to **APL** a further 60 credits at Stage 2 (Level 5) by demonstrating he meets the learning outcomes of the individual modules.*

Tariq wants to get a degree but needs to keep the cost to a minimum. He has been working in marketing for the same company since he left school at 16, and is currently on a fixed term contract for the next 18 months. He is not sure his employer will fund a full degree as he will be leaving when his contract expires.

Tariq could look at doing a Certificate in Higher Education comprising of 120 credits at Level 4 that he could do part-time over a year. He may be able to claim APL up to 60 credits, and can then 'top-up' to a foundation or honours degree at a later point.

Hannah will soon be starting her Honours Degree in Combined Studies. She has been a social worker for 4 years. She has done some training on finance and administration and would now like a career change. She intends to combine Business and Management with Law.

*Hannah may be able to claim Advanced Standing for Stages 1 and 2 (Levels 4 and 5) if she can demonstrate how her previous experience meets the **level outcomes** for the course. She could then apply to APL up to 60 credits at Stage 3 (Level 6). If she is granted Advanced Standing only for Stage 1 she can still apply to APL 120 credits towards her degree, however she must study a minimum of 60 credits at Stage 3 (Level 6) to gain a Bachelors degree with Honours.*

Jiao has her degree in Nursing and wants to continue her studies. She works for the NHS and has a family to look after, so doesn't want to commit to a full Masters just yet. She knows she will need breaks in her study but wants to get as high a qualification as possible.

As Jiao currently works for the NHS she can take advantage of the NHS CPD Contract. She can enrol on a Postgraduate Certificate of 60 credits that she can then top-up later to a Postgraduate Diploma (120 credits) and then again to a full Masters (180 credits) when she is ready. She may be able to APL up to 30 credits towards her PG Cert, and once she has the PG Cert she can use it to claim Advanced Standing towards her PG Dip (or Masters). She can then apply for APL up to 30 additional credits towards her PG Dip. Having achieved the PG Dip she can again use this as Advanced Standing and study the remaining 60 credits (that must include the project/dissertation) for her full masters.

The Equivalent or Lower Qualification policy may affect those wanting to study at the same level or lower in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Under ELQ policy Universities will not receive funding for students studying a course at the same academic level or lower, for example a student who already has an honours degree and wants to study another honours degree would be studying at the same academic level. However there are several exemptions to this policy, and students should contact their Admissions Officer for further advice about whether this policy affects them and how we can support them if it does.

How do I make an APL claim?

The process for making a claim will depend on the type of APL you are claiming. To claim **APCL** for previous certificated learning/training you will need to produce your certificate and give details about the *content* of the course and how you have applied what you have learned from it. APCL is normally fee free, however you should check this with your school.

To claim **APEL** you will need to tell us what you have done and how this demonstrates that you already meet the learning outcomes for the module(s). You should check with your Academic School the process and method for making an APEL claim for your particular programme. Most schools will use a portfolio approach, where you might be asked to complete a form and attach evidence to support your claim. Other methods for making an APEL claim may include for example an interview / viva, poster presentation or a demonstration.

Your APEL application should:

- cover an entire module
- clearly demonstrate how you have already met the learning outcomes for the module
- provide appropriate evidence of that learning. It is vital that you evidence both the experience you have and the *learning* from that experience.

Claiming for concurrent learning (**ACL**) may follow the same process as APEL or APCL, depending on what the concurrent learning is. For example if it is the completion of a certificated course you would use the APCL process, if it is experiential learning from a voluntary placement you would use the APEL approach.

You can make multiple APL applications to claim credit for several modules in your programme, as long as your total claim does not exceed the maximum number of credits for which you can claim APL (50% of the balance of the named award).

Learning Outcomes

In order to APL a module you need to be able to demonstrate that you have met all the learning outcomes for that module. A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student is expected to be able to do at the end of the module. You will find a list of the learning outcomes for each module in the module descriptors contained in the course handbook. In your portfolio you need to tell us how you have met each of the learning outcomes at the level required for this particular programme of study.

How can you demonstrate that you have met the learning outcomes?

You need to consider each of the learning outcomes and think about what issue/ event/ training/ project/ task/role/etc you have undertaken relates to this learning outcome. You then need to provide evidence of the learning you have gained from this experience. Evidence could be presented in a variety of ways:

- certificate
- transcript of training course
- narrative piece
- case study
- storyboard
- website / webpage
- audio or video clip
- observation /demonstration
- interview
- witness testimony or reference

You should check with your module leader which methods are appropriate for your application.

Development of your Portfolio

The development of your portfolio is a process that may take you a number of weeks to complete. Initially you should decide which activities, roles, responsibilities, skills, events, training, knowledge and so on to include. It may help to write things down as a 'mind map' or as bullet points. The next stage is to organise your initial thoughts and ideas into something you can include in your portfolio. You should think of the portfolio as a short piece of writing/visuals (2-5 pages) that explains your previous experiential learning. You may need support from a manager or supervisor at work to help you evidence your experience.

APL writing needs to:

- **Be descriptive:** you need to give details of the context of the activities you are describing: where, when, how, with whom etc.
- **Contain details of what you have learnt** from the particular activity, and how you have used the learning.
- **Include evidence:** for example reference to reports you have written, photocopies of certificates from training and so on.

Evidence

The purpose of providing evidence is to authenticate your claim for APL. You should include any significant documentation such as certificates of attendance on training courses. One piece of evidence may be relevant to a number of learning outcomes however you should only include it once in your portfolio. There are some examples below of the types of evidence you might use. If you are unsure about what you should include, please talk to your course team.

It may help to think of it as similar to filling in an application for a new job. When completing an application form, we usually look at the skills and qualities outlined in the job description and write something about the ways in which our past employment, training and experience has helped us to develop the skills and knowledge required. APL writing is similar; but here you also get the opportunity to include significant supporting documentation.

Questions to help you

These questions are prompts that may help you to start the process of deciding what to include and how:

- What did you learn from the experience / course / training?
- What skills/ learning can you demonstrate competency in following this event?
- What issues in this event can you relate to the learning outcomes?
- What did you do and why?
- Why did something happen?
- Could you have approached the activity differently? Is there an alternative way of approaching it?

Previous Education or Training (APCL)

Include details about previous training and qualifications. If you have certificates you can include photocopies in the 'Evidence Appendices'. We are particularly interested in:

- What you covered on the course
- What learning / skills can be demonstrated from this training?
- How you have used the learning from the course to change your practice and with what effect?

We are particularly interested in training that has been undertaken in the last 5 years. If you have undertaken training that is relevant to the learning outcomes but is more than 5 years old, you may need to provide evidence that your prior learning has been maintained, for example through 'refresher training', continuing professional development (CPD) or other ways of keeping up to date with current policy/practices.

Previous Experiential Learning (APEL)

Examples of activities that could provide evidence for previous experiential learning include:

- Reports written
- Projects led
- Training delivered
- Groups you have facilitated
- Materials you have developed
- Participation in major projects
- Assessments you have undertaken

This is by no means an exhaustive list. We recognise that people bring a diverse range of experience; however the above list may help to begin the process of thinking about what kinds of activities and experience you may wish to include.

Concurrent Learning (ACL)

Include details about learning you are currently doing to develop your portfolio. If you have reflective logs / a PDP you can include a photocopy in the 'Evidence Appendices'. We are particularly interested in:

- What you are doing on the module / course
- What learning / skills can be demonstrated from this?
- How you have used the learning to change your practice and with what effect?

The concurrent learning may be offered as a pathway to producing a portfolio, i.e. built into your programme of study. This may help you to link the learning to your APL claim.

Assessment

Your portfolio will be assessed by someone familiar with the content of the module you are making the APL claim for. They will use the following criteria:

- **Authenticity:** Is the evidence of prior learning genuine? Can we authenticate the claims?
- **Currency:** How current is the evidence? If evidence is more than 5 years old, what additional evidence is there that prior learning has been maintained?
- **Equivalence:** Is there sufficient evidence that the learning is equivalent to the learning outcomes in the module descriptor?
- **Relevance:** Have you made the links between the portfolio contents and the relevant learning outcomes?

In addition, for APEL claims we will assess your understanding of the relevant subject matter, your ability to learn from experience and your communication skills. We may need to contact you for more information or to clarify the evidence you have submitted. You may be asked to attend a short informal interview to help us assess your application, or be asked by telephone.

Your department will inform you who to submit your portfolio to and who will assess it. Following departmental assessment, the portfolio will then be assessed by the Assessment Committee. The work place element of the portfolio will be assessed by the Programme Management Board. There is no right of appeal against the judgement of the portfolio assessors however you will receive feedback on your application.

Portfolios should be submitted at least 8 weeks before the beginning of the module you wish to APL. In the event your APL application does not demonstrate your competence in the module(s), you will continue to study the module at the full module fee.

Cost

On most courses the APEL fee will be 50% of the normal module/course fee, but you should check with your school as there will be exceptions to this. There is normally no cost for APCL provided that you are able to present your certificate(s).

Declaration

You may be asked to complete a declaration that your application is a true and accurate record of you APL, and that it complies with the Data Protection Act (for example if you are using a case study you may need to make the subject of this anonymous).

Further Information

For more information on APL and how to make a claim contact the admissions tutor for your Academic School.